

Planning a Municipal Recycling Program

Maine State Planning Office Waste Management & Recycling Program



Implementing a municipal recycling program requires careful planning. In order to make crucial program decisions, you need to identify what's in your waste stream, what your citizens' concerns are and what your neighboring towns are doing. A feasible timeline for planning and initiating a recycling program is 6 months.

It is important to remember that there is no one correct way of setting up a recycling program. Each town is different from the next and will have different goals. Tailor your program to meet the needs of your town.

Make a Firm Public Commitment to Recycling

The decision to implement a recycling program must have the support of town leaders, including the board of selectmen, town or city council, town manager, public works director and road commissioner. Without commitment from local leaders, the effectiveness of your program will be limited.

Create a Recycling Committee

Creating a recycling committee is an essential first step in the implementation of a recycling program. It is important to involve a wide range of individuals to ensure that the program receives widespread support and meets the needs of all of the various segments of the community. Be sure to include volunteers who are willing to work hard and enough committee members to prevent burn-out!

Set a Goal

Setting a local recycling goal is an excellent public education tool. In the early stages of your program, a goal can provide a measuring stick for participation and give residents something to strive for. A long-term goal can lead to the targeting of new materials down the road and encourage increased participation over time.

Begin Your Education Program

Education is the most important aspect of your recycling program. Publicity and education must occur early in the planning stages and be ongoing throughout the implementation of the program. Many local governments involve the community in the program from its inception. Citizens are therefore better prepared for the lifestyle changes a recycling program entails and better understand its importance.

Start Gathering Data

A good base of information is necessary to design and implement your program. Some of the data you may need includes citizen attitudes, population projections, and the number of permanent and seasonal households in the town. You will also need information about the town's current waste disposal practices and costs, commercial haulers, and local businesses and industries. Finally, you need to know the amount and composition of waste generated by the town.

Estimate Waste Generation and Composition

Waste streams are affected by size and seasonal fluctuations in population, local business and industry, and proximity to other states. In order to develop a recycling program, it is necessary to determine the type and amount of waste generated by your community. Knowing what waste is being generated and in what quantities will allow you determine which materials to include in your recycling program.

Ideally, you will want to conduct residential and commercial waste audits to determine the nature of your town's waste stream. However, if this is not possible, you can estimate your generation and composition using nationally developed guidelines and default figures. Always remember, however, for the most accurate planning, actual data should be used whenever possible.

Visit Other Recycling Programs

Look at other municipal recycling programs to see how they are set up. What materials do they collect? What advice can they offer? What pitfalls can you avoid? What would they do the same or differently?

Investigate Opportunities for Regionalization

It is not practical or economically efficient to operate fully-equipped recycling programs in each of Maine's 494 municipalities. Recycling requires equipment and labor, both of which are costly. In reality, the volume of the recyclables collected by many small towns does not warrant the purchase of processing equipment and the construction of a recycling building. Moreover, the ability to secure markets for recyclables is based on volume. The more recyclables a program can generate, the better its access to markets. A regional program that combines recyclables from several towns at a single location for processing and marketing can make recycling economically feasible.

Set a Schedule for Implementation

Above all else, you need to set a deadline of when you want to start your program. This will provide you with motivation to keep moving ahead. It takes six months to plan and organize a recycling program. Pick a date for implementation that will give you time to effectively plan your program, but one that is not so far away that you become discouraged.

Select Materials for Recycling

You do not need to start your program recycling all materials in the waste stream. Build your program slowly and carefully. After you have gained expertise with several materials, you can expand your program. To start your program, select materials based on ease of collection, volume in the waste stream, and availability of markets.

Conclusion

Successful recycling programs require thorough planning, realistic goals, community involvement, and widespread, ongoing education and shared economies of scale. A successful implementation program must be tailored to characteristics of the community, the composition of the waste stream, and the structure of the recycling handling system.

For more information, please contact:

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